



2011 HOLIDAY MESSAGE FROM THE COMMANDANT AND FIRST LADY OF THE MARINE CORPS

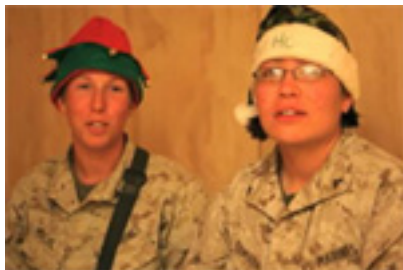


Gen. James F. Amos, Commandant of the Marine Corps, and his wife, Bonnie Amos, sent a special Christmas greeting for all Marines, Sailors and their families. "We want you to know how much we appreciate your dedication and faithfulness, as you have served our great Nation over the past year. Your indomitable spirit, your courage, and fidelity continue to inspire us," the Amos' said. As the Holiday season approaches, Gen. Amos and his wife expressed their appreciation for every Marine and their family. "Whether you're back home in America, deployed around the world, at sea, or somewhere in-between, we want you to know how grateful we are for your love of country and its Corps of Marine...thank you for your faithfulness. To our more than 30,000 Marines and sailors forward deployed and forward engaged in the defense of our Nation in the Helmand Province, aboard ships at sea, at embassies, and in detachments around the globe... we

want to send a special thanks to you in recognition of your efforts and sacrifice. Let there be no doubt in anyone's mind...You remain our Corps' number one priority!" Amos said.

[Click here to see the message](#)

DEPLOYED MARINES SEND HOLIDAY GREETINGS HOME

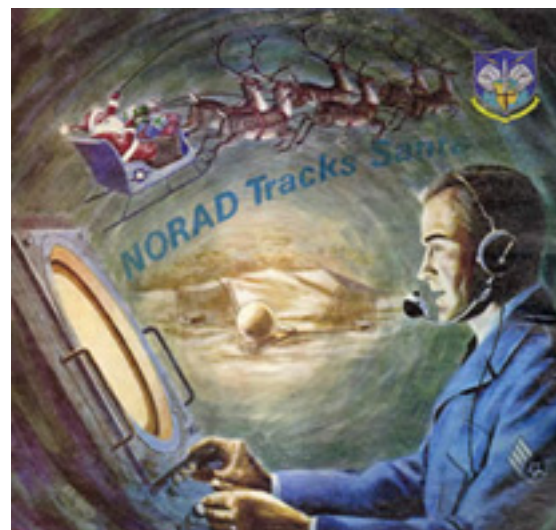


Marines in the 2nd Marine Logistics Group (Forward) aboard Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan, donned festive headwear to record videos of themselves giving a holiday shout out to their families at home in the United States. The Marines wished their loved ones a happy holiday season, told them they missed them and assured them that they would see everyone soon.

[Click Here to see all holiday shout outs](#)

NORAD GEARS UP TO TRACK SANTA CLAUS

As children around the world get ready to nestle into beds this Christmas Eve, their parents will have help predicting the arrival time of Santa Claus in their neighborhoods. For the 56th year in a row, the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) will track Santa's journey around the world. "NORAD stands the watch protecting the skies of North America 365 days a year, but on Christmas Eve, the children of the world look to NORAD and our trusted partners to make sure that Santa is able to complete his mission safely," said Army Gen. Charles H. Jacoby Jr., who commands NORAD. The NORAD Tracks Santa website, which went live Dec. 1, features a countdown calendar, a kid's countdown village with daily holiday games and activities, and video messages from students and troops around the world. Parents and children can also download free iPhone and Android apps to count down the days until Christmas Eve or track Santa on Facebook, Google+, YouTube and Twitter. NORAD also uses radar, satellites, Santa cams and fighter jets in for the annual Santa-tracking mission. On Dec. 24, families all over the world can follow Santa's progress around the globe by visiting: www.noradsanta.org.



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HEROES

MARINE SAVED FROM SUICIDE BY FELLOW MARINE



Lance Cpl. Jonathan Burson was awarded the Navy Achievement Medal for his courageous actions in Helmand Afghanistan, but his heroic actions didn't happen on the battlefield. Instead, Burson helped save another Marine from committing suicide. While getting lunch in the chow hall, Burson noticed a fellow Marine sitting alone and visibly upset. He approached the Marine and struck up a conversation. The next day, Burson saw that Marine at lunch again; he revealed that he had

considered suicide the previous day. Burson contacted authorities to help him, and the other Marine is now on the road to recovery. "Lance Cpl. Burson saved a life. He helped a Marine in distress. He acted. He is a hero," said Sgt. Maj. Michael Barrett, Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps.

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NEWS

AFGHAN NATIONAL ARMY SOLDIERS BID FAREWELL TO MENTORS AS THEY MOVE ON TO BROADER, MORE INDEPENDENT LOGISTICS AND TACTICS

A farewell dinner was held in honor of the 215 Corps

Logistics Battalion, Afghan National Army (ANA) by Marines with the Embedded Partnering Team, 2nd Marine Logistics Group (Forward) (EPT) aboard Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan, Dec. 9. After training together for the past nine months, the ANA is set to begin training with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Training Mission – Afghanistan (NTM-A EPT). The "hail and farewell" between the outgoing EPT and the incoming NTM-A EPT gave the Marines, Sailors, linguists and Afghan Soldiers the chance to say goodbye to those they have trained with for the past nine months. During the farewell gathering, both the Marines and ANA soldiers spoke of their hope for bright and safe futures of their counterparts, and they hope that they could once again come "shoulder-to-shoulder" to work together in the future. This has been their common theme throughout their training together. "Despite the vast cultural, lingual and behavioral differences of the Afghan soldiers and the United States Marines and Sailors, we found commonality through soldierly virtue, military lifestyle and our respective patriotism," said Capt. Patrick Ross, the officer-in-charge of the EPT.



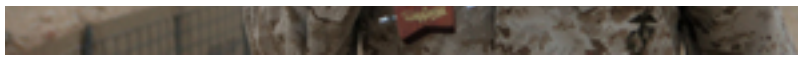
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[See Also: Regional Command Southwest weekly news round-up](#)

FACE OF DEFENSE: MARINE'S CHRISTMAS SONG SALUTES FAMILIES



A few years ago, Marine Corps Master Sgt. Robert Allen wrote and recorded a song for his wife, Carla, and sent it to her on Christmas Eve while he was deployed to Iraq. Allen's song, "A Marine's Christmas Song," features the Marine singing and playing the guitar and can be found on YouTube. The song honors military members and their families who endure the separation of deployment during the holidays. The lyrics resonate with the men and



women who continue to serve in Afghanistan. "Even though we're

busy throughout the day, there are many times where we stop and think about home and how much we miss them -- just miss the little things that we share with them or the stuff we're missing out on," said Master Sgt. Allen. He enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1996 and began playing the guitar while stationed at Marine Corps Air Station in Beaufort, S.C. He started writing his own music because he didn't have anyone to teach him how to play, and he would write songs for his wife for anniversaries. This holiday season, Allen is serving in Helmand province, Afghanistan, as the aircraft rescue firefighting chief for Marine Wing Support Squadron 371, based out of Camp Leatherneck.

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[Click here to watch YouTube video](#)

ALWAYS A MARINE



On Nov. 22, Representative Eric Cantor awarded James Corbin the 2011 Congressional Veterans Commendation during a ceremony at the War Memorial in Richmond, Va. Corbin, a 93-year-old Marine veteran was recognized for his for his five-year military career and two tours of duty in World War II. Despite being out of the Marine Corps for 60 years, he would object to being called a "former" Marine or any other characterization that suggests that he would not be willing and able to ship out tomorrow, if needed. Corbin

still flies the red flag of the Marines outside his home and a leather jacket bearing the branch's Eagle, Globe and Anchor insignia still hangs on a coat-rack in his hallway. He enlisted in the Corps in 1940 after seeing the Marines' blue dress uniforms and started out stationed aboard the USS Erie in Panama. "The Marines was the best education I ever received," said Corbin. "I learned so much about how tough things can be. When you're constantly facing the fear of death, I also learned to pray." Of his award from Congressman Cantor, Corbin said he was flattered to receive the honor. His story will be recorded as part of the Veterans History Project at the Library of Congress.

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WOUNDED MARINE RETURNS HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS



After being deployed to Afghanistan and recovering from injuries in Bethesda, Md., Staff Sgt. Johnny Morris II knew he wanted to be home with his family for the holidays -- and although his reunion might have looked different than his family predicted, they were glad to have him home this year. "This Christmas means the world to us because we were lucky our son wasn't taken from us," said his father, Johnny Morris, Sr. The younger Morris lost the lower part of his leg in Afghanistan earlier this summer, and for the first time on Dec. 12, he walked over to his mother to greet

her, this time using a prosthetic leg. In addition to having their son home for the holidays, the elder Morris and his wife also had the opportunity meet the newest family member, 3-week-old Gage Morris. "My wife's going to see him walk since he was injured, our first grandchild, and it's just great," said Morris, Sr. In addition to the Morris family, dozens in Bay Minnette, Ala., turned out to welcome the hometown hero home. "It really means a lot to me that everyone is going to come out," said Staff Sgt. Morris.

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TOYS FOR TOTS PART OF MARINE'S PRESENT, PAST



Each holiday season, Toys For Tots provides gifts to children in need across the country, and last year alone, 15.9 million toys were collected and distributed to 7.2 million children. In addition to helping the children in need, it can also prove to be an emotional experience for the Marines who help with the program. Earlier this year, Pfc. Andrew Jones volunteered to help with the first 24-hour toy drive of the season with the San Angelo Toys For Tots campaign to help make a difference in a child's life. However, after talking to his mother, he learned the difference the program had already made in his own life. Just days before he volunteered at the toy drive, his mother told him



that during a difficult span in the family's life when his father was away from the home with medical problems, his mother applied for and received toys for Jones and his siblings from Toys For Tots. "She had never told us. She didn't really tell anyone. I didn't know that I received them, and now that I'm a part of it, it's cool,"

said Pfc. Jones.

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HOW A MARINE SAVED CHRISTMAS



Sgt. Matthew Laroche, a U.S. Marine from Leominster, MA, stopped a thief dead in his tracks while working at a Toys for Tots gift drive in downtown Boston Saturday. "I feel like I was just at the right place at the right time," LaRoche said. "Any 22-year-old male, whether in the military or not, especially during this season, would do the same thing." When the Dumler family returned to their SUV, they found a burglar riffling through their gift cards, stocking stuffers and sentimental gifts for their daughters. LaRoche was in the back of his van up the street, loading hundreds of donated toys when he heard the Dumler family yell "help." "I wasn't able to stop him my first time but was able to run after him and catch him,"

LaRoche said. He said he held the suspect up against a nearby building, Drew Dumler caught up, and they pried a screwdriver from the burglar's hand. Afterward, the Marine calmly finished loading his van and dropped the toys at the South Boston Toys for Tots warehouse. Dionizio, the burglar, was arraigned on burglary charges and held on \$3,000 bail.

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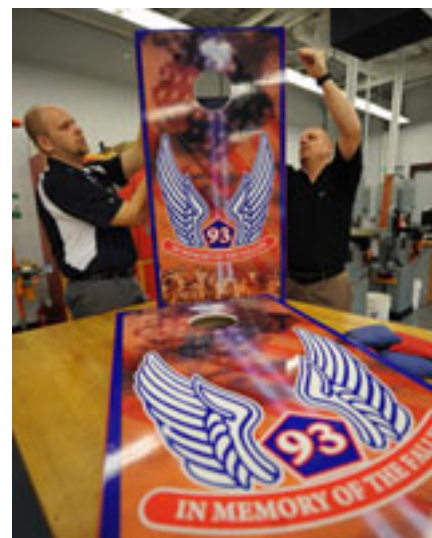
THANK YOU

STUDENTS SCRAMBLE TO HELP WOUNDED

PENNSYLVANIA MARINE

Students at Kiski Area High School in western Pennsylvania selected the family of a Marine suffering from severe injuries after stepping on a hidden bomb to be the beneficiary of a raffle fundraiser. Marine Cpl. Doug Vitale, a 2005 graduate of Kiski Area High School and native of Vandergrift, Pa., lost both legs and suffered a traumatic brain injury while on patrol Sept. 25 in Afghanistan, and he is now being cared for at the Tampa Polytrauma Rehabilitation Center in Florida. The students in the district's alternative education program created a 9/11-themed cornhole game set and will sell raffle tickets at a spaghetti dinner to benefit Vitale on Dec. 16. "We got somebody from here in dire need of help," said technology education teacher Chris Heater, who coached Vitale in football and wrestling and helped with the project. "We thought what better thing to do with that game than sell raffle tickets and raise money to give to Doug and his family." They originally hoped to raise \$250, but they have already exceeded that goal. The winner of the raffle will be drawn on Dec. 22.

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TREES FOR TROOPS PROVIDES CHRISTMAS TREES TO MARINES, FAMILIES

The 2011 Trees for Troops event on Dec. 9 at the San Onofre Community Center at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, Calif., donated more than 1,000 trees to service members and their families. The Trees for Troops program partners with tree growers nationwide who provide the donations, and FedEx, which delivers the trees to military bases and units all over the world. "We have trees being delivered as far away as Kuwait, Spain and Bahrain," said Pam Helmsing, the executive director for the Christmas



SPIRIT Foundation. "For many, a



Christmas tree is a symbol of tradition, and we want to bring a touch of home to every service member, no matter where they are in the world." In addition to the trees, the event featured holiday festivities such as Santa's craft and hobby shop, face painting, holiday music and a visit from Santa Claus. Trees for Troops was established in 2005 and has provided more than 17,000 trees every year to troops and their families at military bases around the world.

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